

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Arkansas Literacy Council, Inc.

Application ID: 14AC155622

Program Name: Arkansas Reads

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

Comprehensive data is provided to support the program design of teaching basic literacy skills. The data presented is relevant and documents the need that the proposed project aims to address.

Compelling evidence is given that the residents in the targeted Arkansas counties are in economic need with a range of 10% to 28.6% poverty rates as compared to national average of 14.3%.

The applicant clearly states the severity of the need for the residents to increase in literacy skills. Recent data is given from the U.S. Census Bureau which details 57% of Arkansas residents lack basic literacy skills which is a higher rate than the national average.

The need is adequately supported that literacy instruction is necessary for the increased immigrant population in Arkansas as established with data from a 2013 Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation Study. Clear data is presented to show the large increase in immigrant population in Arkansas during years 2000-2010 (ranked 4th among states with high immigrant growth).

The applicant provided a Theory of Change that the half time AmeriCorps members are an effective means to solve community problems as evidenced by the direct alignment of member activities, outputs and outcomes.

The applicant states that AmeriCorps members are certified in Basic English literacy and ESL, which are the skills targeted in this intervention.

The applicant does provide convincing evidence that its model is effective for reducing adult illiteracy in Arkansas.

The specific model of using 40 half-time AmeriCorps members to provide low-literacy adults with ESL and literacy tutoring appears to be sound.

The increase in English reading and writing skills have a direct and logical correlation to the reduction of unemployment and increase in individual income in the impacted 42 counties.

The applicant provided satisfactory evidence of past performance including 52% of the participants reaching their identified goal and 54% of ESL participants reaching a personal goal.

The applicant provides compelling evidence of past success such as enrollment trend, number of individuals served, number of instructional hours met, and the number of personal goals achieved.

The applicant indicates an overall increase in the number of individuals who are able to read to their grandchildren, recognizing /pronouncing words, reading instructions on medications, reading a job announcement/application

For the past 3 years Members have exceeded the goal to instruct at least 400 students per year in Basic Literacy skills.

For the past 3 years the members have exceeded the goal to instruct at least 300 students in ESL.

The applicant provides sufficient details of the number of Basic Literacy students (1,875) and ESL adult students (1,172) taught by AmeriCorps members in the Arkansas Reads program during the last three years. Strong data show the members meeting and exceeding the established goal of instructing 400 adult students in basic literacy skills in each program year.

The applicant provides strong details of adult students meeting the program goal of practicing personal literacy such as reading medication directions or reading to children/grandchildren. 54 percent of tutored students met this program goal over the last three years.

Weaknesses:

The applicant cited poverty data as an issue but did not provide a clear explanation as to why this information was presented and how it is linked to low literacy skills.

A connection is not fully drawn between parents' illiteracy in Arkansas and their children's' future educational, societal, and economic limits. Even though two studies are referenced for the linkage (National Center for Family Literacy and National Institutes of Health), no statistics or comparison data are actually given to substantiate the claim.

The applicant does not adequately define the need for additional ESL and literacy instructors. Even though waiting lists for literacy education are referenced, no numbers are given as to the quantity of individuals on those waiting lists.